

Pento Bento!

by pigeonattack

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Summary: Tea. Halloween. Balloons. Dieting- or lack thereof. Txt chat. Conveniently packaged as five totally unrelated one shots. -No refunds or exchanges. Manufacturer is not responsible for addiction.-

## 1. Tea

**\*\*Yeah, yeah, it's up late, stop narking already, dammitâ€|\*\***

**\*\*I was sick, okay? Reduced to a quivering little ball of misery and bedsheets.\*\***

**\*\*Drank twenty-three cups of Chamomile, English Breakfast, Earl Grey, Lemon Lift, and Chai, adding so much sugar I sometimes had to re-dilute it.\*\***

**\*\*This shot's in Wing's point of view, because it's the most challenging (but fuuun!~)â€"for me, at least.\*\***

**\*\*Enjoy.\*\***

**\* \* \***

**><p><strong>Tea<strong>**

She was already there, sitting on a chrome countertop and blowing a steaming mug, when he slipped in, closing the door quietly. The aroma of peppermint, her favorite tea, filled the entire kitchen.

"Hey, Wing." She grinned, taking a tiny sip.

"Hi, Shelby. You're up late." He glanced at the clock, which read a little before twelve. Almost two hours since curfew.

"So are you," Shelby remarked. "Ya here for tea, or here for me?"

Wing turned away to hide his blush. "Both," he replied simply, busying himself with searching through the cupboard for chamomile, disappointed at the apparent dearth. "There's no chamomile left."

"Really? 'm pretty sure I saw a box of it..." She set down her mug and hopped off the counter, joining Wing at the cupboard.

"Hmâ€|"

"That's fine. I'll settle for chai."

"You should try peppermint. It's really good with lots of honey."

"I think of that as more of a daytime tea."

"I don't."

"I'll settle for chai," Wing repeated.

Shelby shrugged. "Whatevz."

Wing found a mug, filled it with water, and stuck it in the microwave for three minutes before joining Shelby on the countertop. There used to be a time when he looked down upon sitting on non-chair furniture. That was at the beginning of these midnight escapades (which HIVEmind seemed to enjoy observing and therefore pleasantly condoned. Of course, hanging around Shelby had proved detrimental to his respectability in private settings.

Their legs brushed against each other slightly as he pushed himself onto the counter. He shifted around to get comfortable, then quickly realized that "comfortable" meant sitting a little too closely to Shelby than his autocratic heart rate permitted.

"You wanna try some?" Shelby offered.

"Hm? Oh." He saw the mug in her hand, held out to him. "No, thank you."

"It's really, really good."

"So you've told me the last twenty times."

"No, I didn't. I had jasmine last night."

"I meant the last three times you had mint."

"\_Pepper\_mint," she corrected.

"Whatev." He imitated her mannerism, earning himself a small laugh that made him really happy. Heart speeding clichÃ©d-ly and all.

The microwave beeped, and Wing slid off the counter to fetch his chai. He added some cream, stirring with a small spoon.

Shelby watched amusedly. "Oh, Wing. Won't even waste a wooden stir stick."

"I try to not dispose unnecessarily, but I don't blame you, being

raised in such a wasteful country."

The smile slid right off of Shelby's face. "Excuse me. I'll have you know I donated twenty percent of my year's profit to Greenpeace when I was twelve. That's a heck of a lot of money we're talking about. I do care about this planet."

Wing was mildly surprised. "You donated that much to Greenpeace?"

"Yeah," she confirmed, still scowling.

"Wow." Gently setting his mug on the counter, he seated himself before turning to give her a slightly awed expression. Suddenly, she looked quite pleased.

"You still determined to beat me at the rock climbing finals tomorrow?" he asked.

"Duh." She smiled patronizingly. "I'm sorry, Wing, but I don't think you're agile enough on vertical terrain."

"We shall see."

There was a silence.

Then, Wing voiced something that had been nagging at his mind. "I wonder what Otto and Laura have been doing in the library lately. They've pretty much been there every free minute."

Shelby smirked. "Oh, I don't wonder."

"Laura has told you?"

"Course not."

"Then how do you know?"

"My intuition tells me," she replied breezily.

He raised his eyebrows. "Oh?"

"Bet you anything they've been snogging up a storm." She grinned at the effect this had on Wing, whose face had gone red at the notion. "Awâ€¦|don't be such a prude."

"Butâ€¦| they're not even togetherâ€¦|"

"I shoulda said mentally. See, whenever they're together and they think no one's watchingâ€¦| dude, the looks they have on their facesâ€¦| so they pretty much just sit there and hopeâ€¦|and wishâ€¦| those poor, oblivious, hopeless souls."

"You seem to know everything about everyone's love life."

"I'm just observant."

"And assuming."

"Am not."

"You are."

"Am \_not\_!"

"I refuse to argue like a toddler."

Shelby rolled her eyes. "Though you have the experience of one. In some areas, at leastâ€¦"

Wing scowled. "That's not being very fair."

"And why not?"

"The inexperience you're referring to is too frivolous for me. I prefer not to waste my time."

"Ah, so romance is a waste of time?"

"In most cases, yes." He took a sip.

Shelby went to rinse her finished mug, then, on second thought, refilled it and stuck it in the microwave.

"What will you have this time?" Wing asked curiously.

"Lemon Lift," she answered, hopping back onto the countertop and bumping into Wing's elbow, nearly causing him to spill. "Oops. Sorry."

"Be a bit less jumpy. I think you put in too much sugar."

"Honey, actually," she corrected, then reverted back to their previous topic. "So, a few minutes ago you said '\_most\_' cases.' What are the exceptions?"

"When they're meaningful. When the feeling is actually there."

"The feeling beingâ€¦?"

"Love," Wing said simply, garnering a funny look from Shelby.

"Since when were you a mushy romantic?"

"\_I'm\_ not the romantic here."

"TouchÃ©," she admitted.

There was a comfortable silence. Shelby watched the mug in the microwave go around and around. Wing finished his tea, then went to refill the mug, just as the microwave finished heating. He switched the mugs before going back to the cupboard.

"Gonna try some peppermint?"

"Hmâ€¦ Passion fruit, I think."

"\_What\_ do you have against peppermint?"

"I have nothing against peppermint. I'm just in the mood for passion

fruit tea."

"Kay, then..."

As with every other night that they snuck out of bed to go to the kitchen, Wing and Shelby talked a little, but mainly sat silently, sipping and enjoying each other's company. It was very pleasant. They'd often considered inviting Otto and Laura, but unspokenly agreed not to.

Wing did like it this way.

Although he'd never admit it to himself, much less anyone else, he really liked spending time with Shelby, whether they were sipping tea, grappler racing, or arguing over some insignificant insignificance. In the year they'd known each other, they'd become really close, capable of instantly anticipating each other's next moves and actions and not just in combat. The only times he felt confused with her were when she was going on about some pop culture thing or clothes. Oh, and there was that one time when Shelby had almost throttled that pretty girl who smiled at him. Fortunately, Laura and Otto had managed to restrain the furious blonde.

"What's going on?" Wing asked Otto as Shelby stormed off for the millionth time that day.

Otto rolled his eyes. "You smiled back."

Things like that were very, very confusing.

"What's up, big guy?" Shelby cocked her head, bringing him back to the countertop world.

"Hm?"

"You're looking at me funny."

"Oh. Uh, nothing's up."

"Kay. Hey, have you ever had a crush?"

The question was so sudden that Wing nearly spewed his passion fruit tea. "What?"

Shelby laughed. "A crush, Wing. Surely even you know what that is."

"Oh. Well, er... Yes, I have..." Wing fidgeted uncomfortably.

Shelby looked surprised, probably having not anticipated him to answer with the affirmative, seeing as most people instantly denied that kind of thing. Wing cursed himself for not having had the wits to do that, too.

"Really?"

"I just said so, didn't I?"

"I'm just surprised. So..." She grinned. "Who's the lucky someone?"

"If I had to tell someone, it most certainly wouldn't be you."

"Why?" Shelby's mind's gears almost visibly turned. No doubt she was jumping to a conclusionâ€|

Wing couldn't let that happen. "If I told you, the whole school would know by morning."

Shelby snorted. "Not necessarily."

"But most likely."

Shelby looked thoughtful for a moment. Then, out of nowhere, her left hand set down the tea and slid off the counter to face him. Reaching up, she pressed two fingers against his neck, directly over his carotid artery.

"Wha-" Wing could feel practically blood rushing to color his face.

"Damn, Wing. Your pulse's going fast." Her face was scrunched in concentration, which made her even cuter in his opinionâ€| He could feel the temperature in the room go up a few more degrees and struggled to suppress that thought.

"I believe that to be my normal pulse rate, thank you," he replied as calmly as he could, getting off the countertop.

"Whoa, your heart is racing!" Shelby exclaimed as she leaned in closer.

Then let go of my neck! Wing thought furiously. He reached up a hand to remove her fingers.

"I wonderâ€|" Shelby muttered with an evil, evil smile. "What would happen if I were toâ€|"

Daringly, she grabbed the back of his neck with her other hand.

His already pounding heart immediately double-timed at the close proximity, so traitorously loudly he could practically hear it. Her face was less than a few centimeters away.

Shelby smirked. "Just as I thought."

And then she closed the gap.

Three things flitted through Wing's mind:

?\_

!\_

!\_

A moment later, all he could perceive was a lemon-peppermint-y taste. Then, he gradually became aware of two things on the back of his neck pulling him downward. Finally, he was surprised (but not dismayed) to

find his hands gripping her waist, then hesitantly sliding upwards to encircle her back, scared beyond belief that he'd do something wrong, exhilarated beyond thought that this was reallyreallyreally happening, dismayed that coherent grammar was simply being chucked out of his mind, but so \_happy\_â€|

And Shelby seemed very happy too, if the happy little noises and the happy way her hands were happily squeezing his uniform were anything to go byâ€|

And Wing didn't mind at all that his ponytail was getting a little messy, because happy-sappy was flappy-ing around them.

Oh, dear. When had he started mentally regressing to the relative level of thought of a kindergarten girl? Ah, but he couldn't really bring himself to care right nowâ€|

\_Creak\_

The sound came from the doorway, somehow making its way through the hazy fog the surrounded the two.

The oral contact broke, as Shelby, gasping, pulled back.

Two heads turned to the doorway, where Franz was meekly peering in.

"Oh, please don't be minding me," he muttered. "Just here for a midnight snackâ€|"

"No prob." Shelby smiled, taking hold of Wing's hand. "We'll continue elsewhere."

\* \* \*

><p>"Wouldn't it be awkward if she came back and found me sitting here?" Laura wondered aloud. She was perched on Otto's bed, critically analyzing his latest generation of self-programming software.<p>

The white-haired Alpha snickered. "They won't be back for a \_looong\_ time. They love their little \_teatime\_. Although how anyone could like \_tea\_ is anyone's guessâ€|"

Laura looked surprised. "You don't like it?"

"I prefer coffee. With a lot of sugar."

"And it doesn't matter one bit that you're underageâ€|?"

"Nope."

"Just what the world needs. Otto Malpense on a caffeine high."

"And a sugar high."

"What do you think they're doing right now?"

Otto pretended to think about it.

"Bet you anything they're snogging up a storm."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>I had to sneak around in the early morning to get this done. My computer time is very limited during the day.<strong>

\*\*You guys' reviews inspire me to do crazy thingsâ€|\*\*

\_\*\*Story Alert\*\*\_\*\* for the next installation: Boo-boo, a Halloween crack- involving pagan rituals, staple-style sewing, and apples.\*\*

\*\*\*cackle\*\*\*

## 2. Candy

\*\*Boo-Boo\*\*

Alarm bells started ringing in Wing's head when he woke up at about three a.m. on Halloween morning to the sound of fabric dying a slow and painful death.

Groggily, he sat up, simultaneously rubbing his eyes and reaching for an elastic to tie back his hair. Otto grinned up at him from his cross-legged position on the floor, determinedly snipping at an amorphous lump of grey fabric.

"Good morning, Wing."

"I can't say I agree, but greetings to yourself, as well."

"Want to know what I'm doing?"

"I am not sure if that information would be beneficial to my sanity." Wing pushed back his blanket, stretching his legs in front of him and reaching for the area in front of his pointed feet to stretch his hamstrings. It was the first in a sequence of stretches Shelby had taught him, herself having learned it from gymnastics.

"I'll tell you!" another voice exclaimed gleefully from the doorway. The aforementioned blonde looked positively ecstatic, gripping a large, ambiguous sack of who-knows-what. Laura slipped through the doorway, grinning madly as well, though Shelby bore a slightly closer semblance to the average lunatic.

Cackling eagerly, the girls plopped down next to Otto, who waved joyfully. Wing merely looked on bewilderedly. "Is there a reason youâ€"

"Costumes!" Shelby semi-yelled, as not to wake their neighbors. "Costumes costumes COSTUMES!"

Wing was utterly nonplussed. "Iâ€"

"It's Halloween, Wing," Laura said calmly. "And Shelby hasn't been able to get her hands on fabric material until last night, so now we really gotta hurry if we want these ready by Fright Fest



tonight!"

Their "fabric material" turned out to be a massive pile of uniforms, in every color of the visible light spectrum.

Oh.

â€|

"Er, how exactly did you acquire those?"

Shelby smirked. "You don't want to know."

Without warning, Otto sprang up, dashing off to the bathroom. Shelby watched curiously as he returned, toilet paper stemming a gushing nosebleed. "Pray codtidue," he gasped, sitting back down.

Laura rolled her eyes disgustedly. "Wow, Otto, get that computer-brain of yours out of the gutter."

"Id'z judt a nodebleed!" Otto protested. "I'b been habing too mbuchâ€" "

"Otto," Laura deadpanned. "Either your mind's dirty, or you've been picking your nose excessively. Decide."

Shelby snickered as Otto's mouth snapped shut. Laura looked unbearably smug.

"Anyways, even I can't do that many people in one night," said Shelby, riffling through the heap of doomed uniforms.

Otto darted off to get grab more toilet paper, smashing it up his nostrils. Laura grinned evilly. "Keep it up, Shel. It's funny to see him do that."

Wing watched in concern and increasing bafflement, though he had a nagging suspicion that he really didn't want to understand. Especially when Shelby responded.

"Naw, we've tainted Wing enough for one night. Morning. No, it's night, right?" She pondered it. "Whatevz."

Otto returned once more, resolutely attacking the gray, amorphous lump with a pair of pinking shears.

Laura turned to him. "You really shouldn't react so extremely at such a simple statement. Usually it takes a lot more to give someone a nosebleed induced byâ€" "

Shelby cleared her throat. "Mixed company, Brand."

"Aye, that's true."

"Look it! Bunny!"

Three heads whipped towards the recently regressed albino, who was proudly holding up several pieces of gray and pink fabric that looked as if they'd been cut by a machine.

"Impressive geometrics, clean lines, and speed," Laura remarked. "But I see no bunny."

Otto rolled his eyes. "I've gotta sew it first. \_Then\_ it'll be a bunny suit."

"If you say so, genius." Shelby shrugged, picking up an orange uniform and brandishing her blades.

"Wait a minute," Wing muttered. "Why are we doing this? I realize it's Halloween, but it's not as if we are going to be walking door to door, trick-or-treating, or whatever you call itâ€|"

"Like, duh," Shelby answered, beginning to snip at the fabric. "Nero's too lame to allow something like trick-or-treating. However, luckily for us poor, bored Alphas, Franz and Nigel dearest are throwing a Halloween party down in Accommodation Block Seven's common area tonight, bless them. And everyone's coming in costume, but since Nero's hasn't exactly given this his stamp of approval, we can't just go and ask HIVEmind for scrap fabric, which is why we had toâ€| erâ€| \_acquire\_ uniforms from other less-awesome accommodation blocks who \_aren't\_ having a lovely party and therefore do \_not\_ need their spare uniforms."

Wing really should not have been surprised after all this time with these semi-lunatics he called his friends, but he was.

Shell-shocked, really.

Although he retained his composure, of course. "Well, then. Iâ€| I have a few questions."

"Fire away!" Otto chirped, wrestling with a length of thread that \_refused\_ to go into the needle eye.

"Come down to our level, though," said Shelby. "You're kinda freaking me out, looking like some stoic lord on that elevated bed. Or something."

Wing consented, sitting between Otto and Shelby and kindly showing the former how to thread a needle, at which the albino immediately asked him how he knew this kind of stuff. Ignoring both the question and the peals of giggles that ensued, he quickly asked, "Soâ€| Franz and Nigel are throwing this party?"

"It's really just Franz, actually," replied Laura. "Nigel's justâ€| y'know. Being Nigel about it. A little nervous, but going alongâ€|"

Wing nodded. He understood. Then he voiced the question that'd been nagging him since the girls had displayed their incredible assortment of fabrics. "How did you get all those colors of fabrics?" After all, HIVE only had four streams and four colors.

"That would be thanks to Laura and me," Otto replied smugly. "We, the geniuses, synthesized red, yellow, and black dye, then used those primary bases to produce the rest of the spectrum."

"Indeed," said Wing. "And where did you accomplish this marvel of

chemistry?"

"The lab. Where else? The kitchen? The toilet?" Otto looked faintly disgusted.

"You'd be surprised at how condoning Professor Pike is about all this," Shelby said. "You'd think if it weren't for Nero's hawk-eyes, Pike would be organizing the party himself."

"Hm."

There was a contemplative silence.

"So," Shelby suddenly exclaimed, startling everyone, including Otto, who'd almost managed to thread his needle.

"NOOOOOO! Damn it, Shelby, you made me lose it!"

To keep the [relative] peace, Wing took the needle from Otto's hopeless hands and calmly threaded it, receiving a relieved, "Thanks, Wing."

Then, ignoring their cries of protest, he left the room.

As he left, Shelby yelled, "Don't worry, Wing! I'll make sure to make you a costume, too!"

Xxx

Wing's next omen came a few hours later. He'd been sitting on an armchair in the accommodation block, browsing next week's Tactical lecture content. If he hadn't been the ultimate ninja, he would have jumped when Shelby materialized out of nowhere and tapped his shoulder.

But he was.

So he didn't.

"Wi-ing!~" Shelby sang, a suspicious-looking sac in hand. Wing felt a rush of dÃ© ja vu at the sight.

"Yes?"

"Your presence is required upstairs, in your room!"

"What exactly will I be doing?"

"Something wonderful and very, very fun!"

Ah. Wing was pretty sure that description did not bode well when dealing with Shelby, but he relented.

After all, he was smart. And knew when to just give up right up front.

Thus, they found themselves in the entryway to the boys' room. Immediately, Shelby danced in, startling Otto and Laura (who had been squabbling over a spool of ribbon like an old married couple, not that Wing would ever say that aloud. The thought charmed him,

thoughâ€¦). The two sprang away from each other, Otto thrusting the ribbon into Laura's arms, muttering, "Here, just take it."

Shelby lifted an eyebrow, but apparently she had better things to do than tease two geek-lover-in-denial-people (which surprised Wing, and made him rather nervous).

Dumping the contents of the bag onto the bed (insert more dÃ© ja vu), procured â€¦

â€¦â€¦

â€¦a costume.

Shaped like a rather familiar cartoon character.

"Isn'tâ€¦isn't thatâ€¦"

"Yup!" Shelby squealed. "Pikachu!"

Apparently, he was to wear that for the duration of the day.

\* \* \*

><p>Even after he'd been assured through and through by all three of the others that <em>everyone</em> would be dressing up, many in waaay more ridiculous costumes, and that he'd look weird in a normal uniform, AND that Pikachu was the height of cool (the lattermost of which Wing had to agree with), he wasn't any less awkward about it until the others dressed up as well, and then only marginally so.

It wasn't until he very reluctantly left the relative privacy of the dorm room that night that he felt a little better...

â€¦because, indeed, everyone else had dressed up.

Some rather ridiculously.

For example, giant space robots seemed to be "the thing".

Next was Megamind. Only a dozen or so of those were milling around far below the balcony he leaned over, possibly because the movie was over a year old. It was one of the few recent movies they were allowed to watch as a part of their studies, though.

Steeling himself, Wing headed towards the escalator, along with one sailor, one bunny, and one rather attractive pumpkin-fairy.

Xxx

Apples.

Bobbing in a large bucket of water that Wing was fairly sure contained a rather dangerous compound last week.

"Professor Pike said we could use it!" Franz (dressed as a purple M&M, which Wing was pretty sure didn't exist, even with his limited knowledge of such things) said happily, rapping his knuckles against the vessel. "Nigel and I disinfected it and everything."

Five eyes turned to the bespectacled boy, who nodded. "We cleaned it very thoroughly, so there's no need to worry."

"Then drink some of that water," Shelby said bluntly.

Nigel paled to the shade of his ghost costume, which he was currently carrying tucked under his arm. "Um, I'm not so sureâ€¦"

Otto prodded the water. "Looks safe. What do we do with it?"

Wing was similarly confused.

Laura gasped. "You don't about the epic bobbing-for-apples Halloween tradition?"

"Is it a HIVE thing?" Wing asked.

Shelby sighed. "Otto, Otto, Otto. You poor, hopeless fool. I didn't expect Wing to know, being Wing, but I had no idea you'd been living at the bottom of a garden pond too!"

Ignoring the boys' indignant protests, Laura explained the concept of snatching an apple out of a bucket of water with nothing other than one's mouth.

Wing frowned. "So you can not use your hands?"

Franz grinned. "Now, that would be too easy, \_ja\_?"

"Sounds easy enough as it is." Otto smirked, preparing to execute an apple-snatch.

"No, wait," said Nigel hurriedly. "We have to wait for the rest of the party to get here!"

The bucket of apples seemed to be the only game in sight. However, the middle of the room was cleared to look suspiciously like a dance floor, and the waterfall had started glowing various colors. Wing assumed there was some waterproof light-emitting object behind it. Also, the table of food in the middle would probably be sufficient entertainment.

And if anyone didn't want to dance, eat, orâ€¦\_bob\_ for apples, they could stare at the dry-ice filled cauldron centerpiece.

"You have quite a set up," he remarked.

Nigel and Franz grinned.

"We have our ways of getting what we need," Franz said proudly.

Out of the blue, music started playing. Nigel glanced at his blackbox. "Oh, good, it's right on time. That's the signal for the party to start," he explained.

"Oooh, the "Monster Mash!" Shelby gushed. "Brings back so many memories of elementary schoolâ€¦"

Laura shook her head. "Lame."

Wing watched as Otto concentrated. Oh, no, he knew that lookâ€¦

And the music abruptly changed toâ€¦ toâ€¦

"Ah, much better," said Laura. "Thanks, Otto."

"I guessed randomly." He looked pleased nonetheless.

Shelby lifted an eyebrow. "You like 'Disturbia'?"

Laura shrugged.

"And, Otto, since when were you sucking up to Laura?"

Wing was rather amused at the identical tones of red gracing their faces.

Franz wrinkled his nose. "Ew, Shelby, that sounds so wrongâ€¦"

\* \* \*

><p>Ten minutes later, the party was in full swing.<p>

\_Yippee\_, thought Wing.

Truth be told, he was enjoying himself quite a bit. It was a little disconcerting at first, when people started arriving, quickly inundating the place until there was nothing visible but costume parts and glitter-from-who-knows-where and dancing bodies piling onto the dance floor areaâ€¦

But then, Shelby asked him to dance.

And with that, he was able to tune out everything: the pigs at the food table, Otto floundering around in the big water bucket, having been pushed in by an irate Laura (who knew a bunny's snide comments about not being able to "bob for fruit" would have such an effect), the screaming revelers and an exhausted, resigned looking Neroâ€¦

None of it really mattered, because Shelby was dragging him into the thick of the action.

"Dude, you need to learn how to party, 'kay? So don't even \_think\_ about resisting."

He swallowed. "Actually, I'm not."

"Good."

"Soâ€¦ how do I do this?"

"Relax. Let go of yourself. Loose yourself in the music, in the beat, in the wonder of Lady Gagaâ€¦"

"Did the song just say 'monster \_in\_ my bed'? I thought the custom was under?"

"You poor, hopeless fool. She means they'reâ€¦"

"Please do not finish that sentence."

"So you DO get it?" She looked incredulous, but a sly smirk crossed face."

"Yes."

"Good for you, Wing. Now, are you gonna just stand there, bobbing up and down to the beat?"

"Perhaps."

"WRONG. You're gonna be!"

And then they danced.

It was nice.

Very nice.

Maybe it hadn't been such a boo-boo to be here, after all.

\* \* \*

<p><strong>Happy Halloween!~<strong>

\*\*I'm not very happy with this fic, so don't hesitate to tell me if it was total, unworthy, fail-crap.\*\*

\*\*I hope you enjoyed it a little, at least!~\*\*

\*\*As for the next shot, prepare for evil balloons.\*\*

\*\*;)pidge\*\*

### 3. Helium Plums

\*\*In which an albino is exposed to his deepest, darkest phobia.\*\*

\*\*Another crack-y shot, but not as bad as last time. Hopefully.\*\*

\*\*And, alas, I could no longer resist the allure of second-person-present. It's really too fun to be healthy.\*\*

\*\*Ootra fans, the time has come.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>The darkness is pressing in on you from all sides. The velvety blackness swirls invisibly, threatening to suffocate you, already squeezing uncomfortably, tightly, painfully, terrifyingly~<p>

And then it's gone. You blink as your pupils retract to pinpoints in the sudden harsh light. You're in some place that looks like the hydroponics dome-thingy, but without the plants and furnishings. It's

totally bare. There's a rush of wind. You're whirled around, faster and faster, as if on a rotating pedestal. Your hands fly out for balance. Colors, bright, flashing colors fill your vision. Reds, yellows, blues, blurring and blending into a vaguely rainbow-y mass.

You jerk to a stop.

\_Holyâ€"\_

Balloons. Everywhere. Teeny ones, seeping through teeny holes in the walls, growing bigger and bigger with every foot they float, filling the ceiling. Smiley faces grin from the round terrors, laughing as you stare up, strings dangling.

Fear.

Panic.

Terror.

The balloons start spinning, or maybe it's you. You take a wobbly step. Okay, so it's the balloons that are madly flying around you. It's like a twister, or a tornado, or whirly cloud-thingy, or whatever they're called, because right now it's hard to think, even with your super genius super villain mind, because there are frickin \_balloons\_ zooming everywhere.

Unbidden, a memory flashes across your mind.

\_It was a dark and stormy night. The wind howled outside the old building. The trees swayed and made strange shadows every time a gust permeated the cracked window and lifted the curtain. Lightning flashed and thunder boomed in answer, sending the little ones flying under their covers.\_

\_In the corner, there was a white balloon with Sharpie-drawn eyes and a wiggly mouth. It was little Penny's birthday (the poor dear).\_

\_The one with the funny white hair was sleeping soundly, somehow tuning out the storm that terrified the others so. Suddenly, there was a particularly powerful crack of thunder. The wind smashed through the window, sending the balloon whizzing around.\_

\_Along with the swirling leaves that had gotten in and the fearsome shadows and the screaming children running around in a frenzy, the white balloon, speeding directly at him, was the first thing the white-haired one saw when he jerked awake.\_

\_Talk about trauma.\_

The memory plays vividly. You remember screaming, running, tripping, and falling out the window as the ghoulish face taunted from above.

The balloons have started to swirl, their serene expressions paralyzing you to the spot. They've started to fill the dome. There's already a thick layer at the top.



The light's getting blocked out. What little that manages to filter through the balloons is colorfully toned, creating dancing effects of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple.

It's all terrifyingly beautiful.

The balloons keep coming. It's an inundation, threatening to overtake the entire dome. You scamper around desperately searching for an exit, all the while glancing up to check on the swarm's progress. The search is fruitless. Futile. In vain.

Three-quarters of the dome is filled. The balloons keep coming, their crudely drawn faces sneering evilly.

Some have sprouted fangs.

\_How the hell?\_

The dangling strings are now low enough to brush your head. You snatch one, popping it underfoot. The sound rings satisfyingly loudly in the silence. You drop the string, snatching another, popping it, then another, but there are so many and they're getting too big to be popped underfoot and they're overtaking you and now the orbs themselves are at eyelevel and you're getting buried alive by frickin \_balloons\_ and this is \_not\_ how you want to die and you're running around, grabbing and popping what you can and you start to screamâ€¦|

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

"Otto!"

\_Huh?\_

The voice is familiar. You snap upright, tangled in a huge mess of blankets and pillows, and possibly the bed liner-sheet-thingy. Your Scottish friend is standing next to the light switch, which she apparently has just flicked.

"Are you alright?" asks Laura.

"Whah? Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm fine," you lie. It takes a moment for you to wonder why you guys are in the same room, but then you just brush it off as something that happens so often it's not even worth contemplating. It's not like you guys actually \_do\_ anything inappropriate.

She looks concerned, but you force a grin. "Sorry about that. Go back to sleep."

"Would you like to talk about it?" Laura asks, turning off the light. You can hear her climbing back into bed. Come to think of it, you're in Shelby's bed (which sounds \_wrong\_, but whatever), and you briefly muse about what she and your best friend are currently up to. It doesn't take long for your mind to meander off in dangerous directions (that probably aren't even factual, given Wing's extreme prudishness and all), but then you remember that Laura (who is considerably more important, especially right now) has just asked you a question.

"Nah. Thanks. 'Night."

"Good night."

You don't fall back asleep.

Somehow, she senses this. You're not sure what it is, but the two of you always seem to be acutely aware of each other's emotions, discomforts, thoughtsâ€¦ Sometimes you wonder if you're computer-brain-ness has rubbed off on her, and now both of you are connected via human-computer-interface or something. Shelby says it's because you guys are "in loâ€¦" , but she never manages to finish the statement before being attacked by a murderous redhead.

Anyways, you're laying there, thinking, and she speaks up. "Are you sure you're okay? According to your breathing pattern, you haven't yet resumed the primary sleep phaseâ€¦"

"Hm? Oh, I'm fineâ€¦ sort ofâ€¦" You shrug, even though you know she can't see it.

"Would you like me toâ€¦ umâ€¦" Laura sounds incredibly awkward all of a sudden. Huh.

And then she sits up in bed.

"Would I like you to what?"

"Uhâ€¦ S-sleep with you? Not like \_that\_, " she adds hurriedly, and rushes on. "I mean, you seem to be scared or uncomfortable or something and I don't like it when you're scared or uncomfortable or something andâ€¦ and when I'm scared or uncomfortable or something it always helps me to have someone to snugâ€¦ er, share body heaâ€¦" er, oh god, this is \_not\_ coming out rightâ€¦"

O-oh.

You can see her standing there nervously, faintly outlined against the dim light coming from under the door. And the (coughcough) \_strange\_ thing is, you yourself don't feel the least bit awkward at all.

"Actually, that'd beâ€¦ nice. Thanks, Laura."

"S-sure."

And she climbs in, scooting a teensy bit closer after a few moments.

You feel a lot better with her next to you, a strand of her hair brushing your nose, her shoulder ever so slightly brushing your arm.

Quietly, you roll over to make the position more comfortable.

Still, you can't shake the thoughts.

Perhaps it's their floatiness, or their roundness, or the helium that belongs in the sun and stars, but for whatever reason, you, Otto Malpenseâ€¦

â€|have a deathly phobia of balloons.

And no one must ever know.

FIN

\* \* \*

><p><strong><em>That<em> was fun.\*\*

\*\*Really fun.\*\*

\*\*It was really hard to write, cuz I kept tumbling off my chair.\*\*

\*\*Soâ€|uhâ€|review. Please. It makes me very happy, and I love my reviewers very much. ;3\*\*

#### 4. Diet Cake

\*\*My beloved readers and fellow conspirators-of-villainy,\*\*

\*\*Thank you for making 2011 the best (happiest, wickedest) year of my life. I hope you had a lovely Winter Break.\*\*

\*\*A toast to the New Year!\*\*

\*\*2012 is already going pretty well. After all, unlike New Year's Eve 2010, pigeonattack did \_not\_ reach blindly for the sparkling cider and spend New Year's Eve 2011 worshipping the porcelain goddess.\*\*

â€|

\*\*Ugh.\*\*

\*\*It really was awful.\*\*

\*\*...\*\*

\*\*A-anyways, I hope you enjoyâ€|\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><span>Diet Cake<span>

\_Ugh. How could you have been so stupid?\_

Shelby stared at her reflection from different angles in the wall-to-wall mirror of Physical and Mental Well-Being Development and Maintenance Area Three. The room's title was a mouthful for such a plain, unadorned roomâ€" just like all those mouthfuls of plain, unadorned but oh-so-delicious slices of cake she'd pigged out on over the holidays.

She blamed HIVE's exemplary bakers.

She also blamed Otto, who'd egged her on by eating even \_more\_ than

she had, and \_still\_ maintained spankin' hot absâ€|

â€|if the beholder happened to be a nerd who liked the scrawny, geeky kind of tummy.

Like her roommate.

Shelby snickered to herself (though, to be fair, Otto wasn't that scrawny), then immediately sobered when she caught sight of her own reflection. "Damn. It looks even worse from this angle."

"What looks even worse?"

Shelby didn't flinch. It'd taken two years, but she'd finally stopped jumping out of her skin every time Mr. Ultimate Ninja materialized at her shoulder. "Oh, good, you're finally here. My belly."

"Yes, I am here. Obviously. I was held up by Otto. Can you believe it? He wants dating advice. Oh, and what about your belly?"

"My belly be big," Shelby said plaintively. "What'd you tell him?"

"Your belly not be big at all." Wing smiled lopsidedly. "You are way too hard on yourself, Shelby." He paused. "I told Otto that he should simply be kind, sweet, conscientious of the feelings of his object of admiration, eager to praiseâ€|"

"I did not ask your opinions regarding my belly. The best advice you could have given him is stay out of the dating scene. He doesn't \_do\_ 'kind, sweet' and all that."

"He does to some people, some times. You know who." Wing walked across the room to a tall cabinet, opening it to pull out two thin mats. He softly shut the door and brought the mats to the center of the room.

Shelby gave her reflection one last critical frown before turning to claim one of the mats. "I'll need to work pretty hard from now on if I want my physique back."

"You're fine," Wing assured her. "You look very nice. I like that hair band."

"Oh, this?" She rubbed the green fabric pulling her hair out of her face as she sank into the lotus position. "Yeah, it's pretty useful."

\_Girl, you will \_not\_ blush\_.

Wing had reclined on his back, his hands behind his head, knees tucked halfway to his chest.

"You look like a dead cockroach," Shelby remarked.

"Why, thank you."

Shelby closed her eyes, attempting to empty her mind. It wasn't working. "It's not just Otto, actually. Laura seems to be able to scarf down whatever she wants without putting on any mass. Neither of

them works out as much as we do. Maybe it's because I'm American."

"Nationality has little to do with weight gain."

"And they both dropped Pilates last semester. One wonders what they did with the empty period."

"One does wonder."

And now Shelby's mind definitely wasn't emptying any time soon.  
"One might even supposeâ€"

"Suppose what you will, but please keep it to yourself." Wing assumed the lotus and closed his eyes. He seemed to be having a lot more success with the clear-your-mind aspect, at least when Shelby peeked over at him.

She immediately regretted it. It was now very hard to look away. Especially since there was no one to witness her appreciating the view.

Wing's eyes snapped open. "You're staring. Is something the matter?"

"No," Shelby said bluntly.

Well, darling, wasn't that smooth?

"You're still staring."

"Oh." Shelby looked away, closing her eyes.

"An explanation seems to be due right about now."

"Need I explain my every action? I am human. I have idiosyncratic quirks."

"Who are you quoting?"

"Who says I'm quoting?"

"The Shelby I know does not come up with lines like those."

"Fine. It was Laura. When I caught her staringâ€" Hm, might wanna stop there, Trinity. Wing might get the wrong idea, what with drawing parallels and all "â€" at the wall."

"Why was she staring at the wall?"

"Idiosyncratic quirks."

"Ah."

"Now, shush. I need to clear my mind."

The silence was long, stifling, and pointless. Ten minutes later, Shelby hadn't achieved any elevated mental state, save for an elevated sense of futility. And an itch.

"I thought you were clearing your mind?"

"I have an itch." Shelby itched. "I think I'll just use this time to do crunches or something. Wish there were such thing as diet cake."

"If you put a tub of oatmeal in the fridge overnight, it becomes gelatinous."

"It ain't cake."

"It is healthy. It is cake-shaped. It makes you not want to eat it. Diet cake."

"It ain't cake." She'd started doing crunches, each one drawn from her abdominal regions, eliciting wonderful burns that each took her one step closer to Super Slender Shelby-ness. "And that sounds like something really mean to do to a perfectly good batch of oatmeal."

"Indeed." Wing opened his eyes, looking down at her. A few stray strands of hair fell in his eyes. Shelby resisted the urge to brush them back with her fingertips. "You should give this another try. It's not all about meditation, you know. There are many poses that greatly strengthen the abdomens."

"Hm." Shelby eyed him skeptically, then rolled forward to sit up straight. "Do they really work?"

Wing shrugged. "I use them."

She glanced at his tummy. She was no sucker for ripped abs or nothin', but his midrift looked good. Really good. "I'll give it a try."

Wing smiled happily, which in itself was kinda worth going through all this give-it-another-try business. "I'll show you." He demonstrated a standing pose, then gently pulled her up and arranged her posture. "Now, lift your right leg like thisâ€|"

\_Definitely worth it. You go, girl.\_

Maybe she should eat cake more often, if this was the result. Then again, she'd get fat, and wouldn't look nearly as awesome doing this.

Then, Wing softly placed his hands on her shoulders, easing them into relaxation. "just like that," he whispered.

"Damn it, Wing, you have \_no\_ idea what kind of effect youâ€" uh, your style of exercise is having on me. Um, I feel stronger already."

"That is good. Now, please clear your mind. Just give it a try."

Together, they did yoga.

FIN

## 5. Txt Cookies

**\*\*Last Wednesday was the anniversary of a curious pigeon's landing on fanfiction-dot-net. Which means it's been one year. Twelve months. Over 365 hecka awesome days of writing, sharing, and laughing in delight. There are waaay too many people for me to thank- people who've each made my year absolutely fantastic, whether as PM/forum buddies or anon reviewers. It'd take waaay too long, and this author's note is already waaay too long.\*\***

**\*\*You know who you are, though. So thank you.\*\***

**\*\*I was going through my laptop last night to chuck out junk, because my archaic 2006 iBook G4 (shutupi'mnotrich) has \_this\_ little space: \*holds up thumb and index finger\*.\*\***

**\*\*And I happened across ye olde Pigeon Prom and various one-shots.\*\***

**\*\*And my face was like, 8/.\*\***

**\*\*A-ahaha... I think I can safely say I've come pretty far since then, haven't I?^^\*\***

**\* \* \***

><p><em>With all the nifty thigns blackboxes can do, I'm sure textingopen chat is among them. If not, please pretend, for the sake of this multi-media ficlet.\_

\_All typos intentional.\_

\_. . . \_

Correspondence

**\*\*Alpha Factor Open Chat Room\*\***

\_Shelby Trinity, Laura Brand, and Otto Malpense are online\_

7:45 a.m. Shelby Trinity

dude where r u been down here 4 an hour and albinos gonna piss in his pants. something bout a project

7:47 a.m. Laura Brand

Up in room, finishing project. Tell him to relax. Tech doesn't start for another hour. Shel, would it kill you to not write in txt format? Been up all night. My eyes hurt.

7:47 a.m. Shelby Trinity

sorry cant be bothered to type proper-like for a puny little note. ill tell otto ur still working but he wont be happy wants to make sure its all perfect

7:50 a.m. Laura Brand

He has no faith.

7:50 a.m. Otto Malpense

hey its not that i doubt your abilities or anything just want to have time to admire and praise

7:51 a.m. Shelby Trinity

yo stop looking over my shoulder dude not cool. wing make him stop

Wing Fanchu is now online

7:53 a.m. Wing Fanchu

The attempt would be futile.

7:53 a.m. Shelby Trinity

hoshit, ur actually online!

7:53 a.m. Wing Fanchu

Language, Shelby. Just because this is a private four-way doesn't mean Dr. Nero doesn't monitors these conversations.

7:53 a.m. Otto Malpense

ah, luuuuv

7:54 a.m. Shelby Trinity

shut up little girl

7:54 a.m. Otto Malpense

heh heh. touchy, r we? im sitting right nxt 2 u, just say whatevr u want to my face

7:54 a.m. Shelby Trinity

yeah yeah

7:54 a.m. Otto Malpense

wheres laura gone? she just kinda disappeared from the line.

7:55 a.m. Wing Fanchu

So did I.

7:55 a.m. Shelby Trinity

yes, wing, but ur not the one on his mind 24/7. u see, when a little boy reaches a certain ag DUDE STOP READING OVER MY SHO

7:55 a.m. Wing Fanchu

GIMME BACK MY FRICKIN BLACKBOX



7:56 a.m. Otto Malpense

say it to my face, why dont ya? Hey, wing, what the

7:56 a.m. Shelby Trinity

This is Wing. I am not giving this back until Shelby returns Otto's, or whatever has configured... I am slightly confusedâ€|

7:56 a.m. Otto Malpense

grrrâ€| you littleâ€|

7:56 a.m. Laura Brand

On my wayâ€| Whoa, wtf is going on down there? Shelby, Otto, swap your bloody blackboxes back right now because you guys are confusing the â€"censored- out of me.

\* \* \*

><p>"My baby," Shelby crooned, stroking her blackbox. "Mama will <em>never<em> let you out of her sight again, okay? No need to worry about the big, scary albino monster."

"No more text chatting when we're within speaking distance, please." Wing looked distastefully at his.

The four of them were seated near the back of the Stealth and Evasion lecture hall. Ms. Leon was uncharacteristically late, and Otto's hand kept twitching towards his blackbox. Laura sharply swatted it away.

"Fine," Otto said petulantly, crossing his arms and squeezing his eyes shut. "Remember, you pushed me to do this."

"Not a good idea, Malpense," Shelby warned.

His eyes remained shut.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Alpha Factor Open Chat Room<strong>

All Alphas forced online

8:04 a.m. Otto Malpense

hey. im bored. laura brat isnt letting me touch my blackbox. someone apprehend her.

\* \* \*

><p>"Y'all better thank your lucky stars <em>I'm<em> around," Shelby said proudly, dusting off her hands as they walked to Tech. Some of the students had taken that literally, and she and Wing had had to hold them off. Luckily, Ms. Leon had shown up right when things started getting messy. A few little white lies on Otto's part kept him out of detention, though the other three were pretty sure he

deserved it (and Laura had testified passionately against him).

"Thank you, Shelby. Thank you, Wing. Thank you, Otto, for volunteering me into your little entertainment-scheme-thing."

"You're welcome!" Otto said cheerfully. "Great boredom buster."

"OTTO MALPENSE!" Laura bellowed, startling a few first years.

"LAURA BR&eac"

Shelby's hand slammed over his mouth as a few guards came around the corner, looking suspiciously in their direction. "Now, you know how much I \_love\_ listening to you two and your lovers' quarrels&eac"

Wing gave her a sharp nudge.

"&eac"but here and now are \_not\_ the best times, especially since you've already gotten into enough trouble today."

"You sound like a kindergarten teacher," Otto muttered.

Laura had a scandalized expression. "'Lovers' quarrel?"\_

Shelby waved it off. "Hush, dear, don't scrunch up your face; it's bad for wrinkles." She paused. "I mean, good for them. Like, it helps wrinkles form. Which is bad. For you."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Alpha Factor Open Chat Room<strong>

\_Shelby Trinity, Laura Brand, and Otto Malpense are online\_

5:58 p.m. Laura Brand

Otto, if you don't get down here in two minutes, we're starting dinner without you.

5:58 p.m. Otto Malpense

no ur not

5:58 p.m. Laura Brand

Otto, if you don't clean up your text-speak right now&eac| bad things will happen.

5:59 p.m. Otto Malpense

what kind of bad things? ;P

5:59 p.m, Laura Brand

&eac|You'll become a txt-speaking dunderhead. And I'll be too irked to ever speak/chat/text you ever again.

5:59 p.m. Otto Malpense

and that's bad becauseâ€|?

5:59 p.m. Shelby Trinity

ah, lovers quarrels. this is better thn soap dont u think wing?  
;3

5:59 p.m. Laura Brand

If you're going to purr out nonsense, could you at least put some originality into it?

6:00 p.m. Otto Malpense

awwwwâ€| 'nonsense'? u hav hurt me lauraâ€|

6:00 p.m. Laura Brand

HAH! Your post says 6:00! You're late! Ay, I'm off to eat now.  
:DDDD

6:00 p.m. Otto Malpense

NOOOOO! NOT OKAY!

6:00 p.m. Wing Fanchu

I vaguely remember saying something about not texting each other when we are within speaking distance.

6:00 p.m. Shelby Trinity

good luck enforcing that. XD

6:00 p.m. Wing Fancu

Thank you. I will need it.

6:00 p.m. Shelby Trinity

â€|u dont get sarcasm, do you?

6:01 p.m. Wing Fanchu

It is a bit difficult to recognize onscreen. May we continue this conversation verbally?

\* \* \*

><p>Shelby snapped her blackbox shut. "Sure. We should probably get going before Franz gets here, anyways."<p>

Wing nodded. "But what about Otto?"

"His prob."

She was strangely silent as they made their way to the serving

counter. Then, grabbing a tray, Shelby suddenly grinned.

Wing looked at her warily. That grin... "What is it?"

" 'Enforce'. Light bulb moment, dude." Shelby turned to the serving counter and pulled out a plate for each of them. "I'd totally love to see you in a police uniform."

FIN

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Thus concludes Pento Bento.<strong>

\*\*Thus commences a new chapter in pigeonattack writing.\*\*

\*\*New year, new style. Toned down fluff (unless riots break out).  
Tuned up plots (unless I get too lazy).\*\*

\*\*Ready?\*\*

End  
file.